



The Role of Cinema in the Modernization of Iran during the Pahlavi II Era: Cinema as a Tool for Modernization (1940-1978 AD/1320-1357 SH)

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present research aims to dissect the role of cinema as a tool for modernization during the Pahlavi II era (1940-1978 AD/1320-1357 SH). The central question of this research is how cinema was employed by the Pahlavi government to advance modernism in Iran. In fact, this study will focus on the diverse roles of Iranian cinema during the Pahlavi II era as a tool, addressing the consequences and functions of Iranian cinema during the period (1978-1940 AD/1320-1357 SH).

Method: The author employs qualitative methods, including documentary analysis and interviews with Political and artistic elites, to strive for a new interpretation of the role of cinema in the modernization of Iranian society from a different perspective.

Results: Cinema, as one of the most important mass media, played a significant role in accelerating and advancing the modernization project of the Pahlavi dynasty. The political elites of the Pahlavi regime consciously utilized the medium of cinema to implement cultural and social modernization programs. Similar to all aspects of Pahlavi modernization policies, which conflicted with the realities of Iranian society, the top-down authoritative modernization disregarded historical, cultural, religious, and political conditions in its pursuit to create a modern and westernized society. In this context, cinema, regarding its visual capabilities and attractive imagery, became one of the most effective forms of mass media. The transmission of Western values to Iranian society and the representation of a modern, secular, and westernized image of Iran for both Iranian and foreign audiences were the primary mission of cinema from the perspective of the Pahlavi political elites. Political elites of the Pahlavi regime consciously used the power of cinema as a tool to transfer Western culture, weaken Islamic-Iranian traditions, present a modern image of Iranian society, blur public-private boundaries, promote ideology, and gain political legitimacy while constructing a unified nation-state.

Conclusions: The question of the consequences of modernity on Iranian society remains an unfinished concern. In this context, cinema has played a significant role as one of the main carriers of modernity in transferring Western values to Iranian society. From the moment cinema entered Iran, it served nationalism, modernity, and Westernization. Undoubtedly, when cinema entered the country, Iranian society was not one in a vacuum but was filled with a glorious history and deep-rooted Islamic and Iranian traditions. During the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah, Iranian cinema, supported by the Pahlavi regime, became a tool for advancing the modernization of Iranian society. The detrimental consequences of authoritative modernization and the use of cinema as a modernization tool left profound negative impacts on the structure of Islamic-Iranian identity.

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Introduction

"Cinema in the West emerged from the scientific laboratories of the industrial world, but began with a public display for ordinary people, just as the world of film analysis and criticism came from philosophical and theoretical experiences and became accessible to audiences for a clearer, more rational, or more internal understanding of film. These films were produced during the granting of concessions, the raising of customs revenues in the north and south, and during the second wave of industrialization of the country, which was accompanied by an open-door policy; a period when the spectacles of the West dazzled and attracted us. The dictatorship was not satisfied with expanding the opportunities of the new world for the public but was also drawn to its great and revealing mirrors, namely photography and cinema. Until it found ways to impose this on audiences, it did not allow any image of itself to be shown on the cinema screen, as showing it to the public meant accepting the participation of the people in seeing and experiencing the world." (Baharlu et al., 2000 AD/1379 SH: 12)

Cinema, as one of the most important mass media, played a significant role in accelerating and advancing the modernization project of the Pahlavi dynasty. The political elites of the Pahlavi regime consciously utilized the medium of cinema to implement cultural and social modernization programs. Similar to all aspects of Pahlavi modernization policies, which conflicted with the realities of Iranian society, the top-down authoritative modernization disregarded historical, cultural, religious, and political conditions in its pursuit to create a modern and westernized society. In this context, cinema, regarding its visual capabilities and attractive imagery, became one of the most effective forms of mass media. The transmission of Western values to Iranian society and the representation of a modern, secular, and westernized image of Iran for both Iranian and foreign audiences were the primary mission of cinema from the perspective of the Pahlavi political elites. The depiction and presentation of concepts and ideas from Western civilization often led to conflict and opposition between religious classes and the Pahlavi government considering their contradiction with Islamic-Iranian traditions. For example, Shaykh Fazlollah condemned the films of Sahafbashi's cinema because they featured women with uncovered heads or were said to promote irreligion and numb the populace. He referred to Westernization and modernity as a "Sleeping Drug" or a "Deadly Poison" brought to the "Pure Soil of Iran" by proponents of naturalism and other Western schools of thought. Shaykh Fazlollah Nouri likened Western-style freedom to a

"Smooth-talking snake" that first enchants its victim and then subjugates them. This struggle and conflict between social classes and the Pahlavi government over the role, functions, and consequences of cinema has formed one of the deep disputes in contemporary Iranian history. Therefore, the present research seeks to elucidate the role of cinema as a tool in advancing authoritative modernization. In fact, this study will focus on the diverse roles of Iranian cinema during the Pahlavi II era as a tool, addressing the consequences and functions of Iranian cinema during the period (1978-1940 AD/1320-1357 SH). Accordingly, the author employs qualitative methods, including documentary analysis and interviews with cinema elites, to strive for a new interpretation of the role of cinema in the modernization of Iranian society from a different perspective.

1. Research Background

Cinema and modernism, as two major subjects, have each received considerable attention from many Iranian and foreign researchers and thinkers. However, there is a scarcity of research regarding the role of cinema in the modernization process of Iranian society during the Pahlavi era. A brief look at the most important existing research works in the two realms of cinema and modernity can assist researchers in their studies: Mahdi Rahbari and Saeed Mohammadzadeh, in their article "Cinema and the Occurrence of the Islamic Revolution in Iran," have analyzed the impact of cinema as a cultural factor on the formation of the Islamic Revolution using content analysis. They believe that cinema, as one of the most important mass media, has played a crucial role in shaping a mass society and revolutionary ideas in Iran regarding the mismanagement and some of its inherent characteristics (Rahbari & Mohammadzadeh, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 83). Jahanbakhsh Thavaqib et al., in a research article titled "The Impact of the Clash Between Tradition and Modernity on Iranian Cinema During the Second Pahlavi Era (1953-1979 AD/1332-1357 SH)," evaluated the trends in film production in Iran and the changes and developments therein, as well as the implications of audience reactions to cinema during the Pahlavi regime between 1953 AD/1332 SH and 1979 AD/1357 SH. They argue that the uneven modernization during Mohammad Reza Shah's reign created a rift between society and the government. This divide, which arose between tradition and modernity among the audience of this era due to social and economic modernization, also affected Iranian cinema and its productions, leading to bankruptcy and a

crisis in cinema in the years leading up to the Islamic Revolution (Thavaqib et al., 2019 AD/1398 SH: 41-42). Mojtaba Ashrafi and Shokrollah Khakrand, in their article "Examining the Role and Position of Iranian Cinema in the Cultural and Political Transformations Leading to the Islamic Revolution of Iran During the Second Pahlavi Era," argue that cinema, as a governmental medium, serves as a steward of cultural, social, political, and economic policymaking, presenting caricature-like and incomplete images of developments and conditions in Iran. Ultimately, factors such as the prevalence of banality within Persian cinema and the support of this medium for the regime led to the disappointment of the people with the cultural policies of the government during the revolution, as cinema was one of the main elements of the cultural, political, and social structure of the Pahlavi regime (Ashrafi & Khakrand, 2017 AD/1396 SH: 93).

Despite the wide variety of research works related to the fields of cinema and modernity, it should be noted that there are fewer works in the area of the relationship between these two concepts, that is, cinema and modernity in general, and particularly between cinema and modernism. The distinguishing features of the present research compared to previous studies can be summarized in several key points:

- 1) Unlike previous research, the present study positions cinema as an independent variable and modernity as a dependent variable;
- 2) Attention to the role of cinema as a tool of modernism is another point of differentiation between the current research and existing studies;
- 3) Focusing on the consequences and results derived from the application of cinema as a tool to accelerate and advance the process of the modernism project is another innovation of the present writing.

2. Method

In this research, the author has benefited from the interview method in order to achieve the research objectives and answer the research questions. Interview is one of the old techniques in order to obtain information in social sciences, and it is considered one of the common methods in political sciences, especially in the form of interviews with political elites. The author employs qualitative methods, including documentary analysis and interviews with Political and artistic elites, to strive for a new interpretation of the role of cinema in the modernization of Iranian society from a different perspective.

3. Act One: Iranian Cinema During the Qajar Period (1878-1905 AD/1279-1304 SH)

The entry of cinema into Iran coincided with the country's entry into a new era, namely modernity. The arrival of the railroad, automobiles, electricity, telephones, and cinematographs were among the first signs of the onset of modernization in Iran (Azkia et al., 2007 AD/1386 SH: 30). Mozaffar al-Din Shah, during a trip to Europe on Farvardin 24, 1279, became acquainted with the cinematograph in France and brought it to Iran (Omid, 1998 AD/1377 SH: 20-21). Due to opposition from the clergy and religious people, the Shah was afraid to introduce this strange device widely into the country. Therefore, the establishment of cinema halls and, by extension, the production of Iranian films occurred with a 20-year delay after the arrival of the first camera in Iran. For this reason, the filming device first went to the royal court and remained within that sphere (Nabavi, 1998 AD/1377 SH: 28-29). From the very beginning, cinema in Iran did not have a favorable relationship with religion, to the extent that in the early years of public cinema usage, the simultaneous showing of films and the performance of *Ta'zīyah* (Shia passion plays) was noteworthy. It was presumed that this simultaneity was a premeditated strategy aimed at sidelining *Ta'zīyah*. Furthermore, from the outset, clergy were generally opposed to cinema; in the early years of cinema's introduction, Shaykh Fazlollah Nouri issued a fatwa against attending cinemas (Mehrabi, 1984 AD/1363 SH: 18-19).

4. Act Two: Iranian Cinema During the Reza Shah Era (1921-1942 AD/1304/1320 SH)

The period of consolidating Reza Shah's rule was not one where Iranian cinema could engage in continuous film production. The cinematic works from 1920 AD/1299 SH to 1926 AD/1305 SH were limited to a few feature films and short documentary pieces shot by a handful of filmmakers who had access to cameras. In Aban 1304, Reza Khan ascended to power and established his dictatorship with the support of foreign powers and Western-minded intellectuals. The years of his rise to power did not witness a complete entry of Western manifestations into Iran. It was only when modern currents in governance and the establishment of a governmental pyramid and a Western model solidified their place as the method of systematic governance that cinema gradually found its cultural footing: "Western-

style modernization in Iran during Reza Shah's reign was prioritized culturally and economically over other goals, especially changing the relationship and method of exercising power and increasing political participation." (Bashiriyeh, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 67)

Reza Shah used cinema as a tool for modernization and to promote himself as the savior of Iran. "Documenting scenes of the opening of telecommunications facilities, railways, the construction of bridges and roads, court ceremonies, and military parades were examples of films that were documented by Khan Baba Khan Motazedi, the court filmmaker of Reza Khan, commissioned by the Shah himself. Khan Baba Khan Motazedi was the first person to combine scenes from various parts of Iran with images of Reza Shah and the royal anthem to create a clip that would play before films in cinemas, prompting audiences to stand in its presence. Later, until the late ۱۳۴۰s, the royal anthem remained on screen with images of Mohammad Reza Shah, and audiences were compelled to rise from their seats, listen to the royal anthem while viewing images of the Shah, and then settle down to watch the films." (Sadr, 2002 AD/1381 SH: 37)

5. Act Three: Iranian Cinema During the Second Pahlavi Period (1957-1941 AD/1320-1357 SH)

After the fall of Reza Khan following the Allied occupation of Iran, screening restrictions in cinemas limited film exhibitions during the early months of the occupation due to wartime conditions, and the film industry nearly came to a halt. Many cinema halls closed, and some were dedicated to screening newsreels of the Allies' victory in the war against Axis countries, which were selected for screening by the political representatives of the Allies in Iran. With the rise of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi to power, the support and perceptions regarding cinema changed. The number of cinemas increased, and the audiovisual format as an important strategy took on a new shape in its approach to propaganda (Kashani, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 68-69).

The first decade of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's rule (the 1320s) was considered a period of weakness for his power. In the years of Iran's occupation, the American efforts to influence Iranian cinema were significant, to the point that of the 400 films screened in Iranian cinemas during the 1320s, 300 were American productions (Saedi, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 34). The United States intelligence agency began plans for the exhibition and production of films in non-

communist countries like Iran. As part of this plan, a group of professors and filmmakers from Syracuse University visited Iran in the early 1950s to establish film development laboratories and train Iranians to produce documentaries and educational films. Regarding the lack of television, they also made short films titled "News of Iran," which were produced with the approval of the Shah and the United States. 402 copies of these short films were screened in public halls throughout the country (Neville Smith, 1998 AD/1377 SH: 790).

6. Results

1.6. The Role of Cinema as a Tool for Modernization During the Second Pahlavi

The government of Mohammad Reza Shah did not allow cinema to develop beyond its nature and form as entertainment. Entertainment and propaganda for the state were recognized as the two bases of cinema's non-political functions, receiving attention and support. Regarding this trend, in statistics presented a few years later, cinema, especially among societal classes, was introduced primarily as a mechanism of entertainment. As a result, the factors of entertainment, escape, and fantasy in seeking refuge in cinema halls were among the fundamental elements (Ali Asadi, Culture and Life, No. 13 and 14, p. 14).

In general, it can be said that cinema during the Second Pahlavi period had two evident and hidden functions. The overt function of cinema was based on entertainment and leisure, while the hidden function, which was significantly more important and occurred in the underlying layers of identity and politics, was the exploitation of the power of propaganda and the impact of cinema as a tool of modernization aimed at transforming Iranian society in line with the Pahlavi ideology. In this context, the political elites of the Second Pahlavi consciously utilized the power of cinema as a modernization tool to transfer Western culture, undermine Islamic-Iranian traditions, present a modern image of Iranian society, blur the boundaries between the public and private spheres, promote ideology, gain political legitimacy, and construct a unified nation-state.

In this section, we will discuss the various roles and functions of cinema as a tool of modernization and its consequences during the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah:

2.6. Cinema as a Tool for Transmitting Western Culture to Iranian Society

From its inception, cinema has acted as a carrier and transmitter of the values of Western civilization to Iranian society. Among the long list of elements of Westernization in Iran, cinema was the most recent and last item. The political and artistic elites of the Pahlavi era sought to use cinema as a tool to convey modern concepts from Western civilization to Iranian society. In other words, during the Pahlavi period, cinema served as one of the bearers of Western modernity, leading to the spread, dissemination, and infiltration of Western modernity concepts. This means that during the Pahlavi period, cinema played a role as a tool for transferring culture, thought, and concepts of modernity to Iranian society. This process of consciously transferring and injecting Western values into Iranian society during the Pahlavi era was entirely one-sided. While cinema, due to its numerous facilities and capabilities, could have significantly contributed to the representation and introduction of authentic Islamic-Iranian culture in cinematic films for both Iranian viewers and foreign audiences.

According to most of the ruling political elites from the Qajar period until the end of the Pahlavi dynasty, third-world countries must follow the same path taken by Western societies to reach the peak of progress and development; thus, they had a universal perspective on the experience of modernity. In this context, the political elites of the Pahlavi era believed that cinema could also be utilized as one of the tools of the modern age in the transition from a traditional society to a modern one. Accordingly, the Pahlavi government, especially Mohammad Reza Shah, used cinema primarily as a tool to negate religion and combat the symbols of traditional and religious society; according to one communication professor: "Iranians during the Pahlavi era, both in the media and in terms of messages, were always consumers. The main indicators of modern Iran emerged first in Iranian society and later in Iranian cinema starting from the 1340s. The modernization of Iranian society during the Second Pahlavi was rooted in the dramatic increase in government revenues from oil sales. Filmfarsi emerged during this period, based on singing, dancing, cabaret, and unconventional sexual scenes, which had no relevance to Iranian culture and society. Interestingly, one of the main roots of the emergence and occurrence of the Islamic Revolution is cinema. Through star-making and cultural shaping as a Western media, cinema has initiated profound social and cultural transformations that are in contradiction with Iranian values and norms. For instance, the depiction of sexual scenes in a theater during the 2,500-year celebrations of the

monarchy was in stark contrast to the religious and traditional society of Iran." (Interview with Faiq Hosseini, 25/04/1403)

A film director said: "Until the revolution, this path was a one-way street. That is, until the early 1360s, cinema was primarily an importer to Iran, and we were unable to export elements of Iranian culture to the West. For example, the influence of American westerns, Italian westerns, French poetic cinema, and film noir had a profound effect on the culture and attire of Iranians, while we could not use cinema as a tool to export our values, traditions, and identity to the West, and this issue did not occur until the 1360s. Until that time, Iranian cinema was more akin to Egyptian cinema and Filmfarsi. It was a melodramatic and musical cinema that was heavily focused on entertainment through a series of superficial heroes. After the 1360s, filmmakers like Naderi, Beyzae, Majidi, and Kiarostami sought to introduce the Iranian ecosystem and return to national and Islamic-Iranian identity in Iranian cinema through the representation of moral and humanitarian concepts such as human compassion." (Interview with Babak Lotfi Khajeh Pasha, 29/03/1403)

It seems that cinema has only been able to convey a distorted image of modernity to Iranian society during that period and has been incapable of transmitting the concepts and ideas of modernity. One film critic says: "Iranian cinema does not create any contemplation or pause regarding the relationship between a traditional and religious society and the modern. Iranian cinema during the Filmfarsi era, according to critics, presents a completely distorted image of a period of cultural crisis and turmoil. In this crisis, cinema does not create a modern experience for us; rather, it creates an image that is highly fantastical and city-like. Therefore, we are faced with an image of modernity. In reality, we Iranians have always experienced an image of modernity rather than a real experience of modernity or modern thought. Cinema acts as a tool and a colorful, fantastical image of modernity. This means that the perception of the West as a safe place and an ideal city has been entrenched in the Iranian mindset." (Interview with Mahdi Nazemi, 07/04/1403)

3.6. Cinema as a Tool for Undermining Indigenous (Islamic-Iranian) Traditions

From the moment cinema entered Iran, it served nationalism, modernity, and westernization. Undoubtedly, when cinema arrived in Iran, the Iranian society was not a society in a vacuum; rather, it was filled with a glorious history and deep-rooted Iranian and Islamic traditions with

multiple layers of identity. The deep oral tradition, along with a rich visual tradition and performing arts, faced indifference from the political elite of the Pahlavi era. During this time, artistic and political elites played a crucial role in the anti-traditional stance of cinema. In fact, cinema mostly developed in opposition to and in contrast with Iranian and Islamic traditions. Cinema not only did not contribute to the revival and reproduction of traditions but also sought to undermine them. The earliest films screened in Iran were foreign imports that Iranian audiences accepted as visual models or references. For example, figures and gestures such as smoking, styles of dress, and social customs influenced Iranian audiences. Mid-era filmmakers paid little attention to the main concerns of Iranian society. Early filmmakers inspired by and referencing foreign films and the modern concepts within them, created similar cinematic works.

Considering the different historical conditions of Iran compared to other countries, cinema has decisively led to the weakening of traditions during that historical period. Cinema in Iran has never been able to connect with tradition. One communication professor says: "In the films of the Pahlavi era, rather than establishing a connection between tradition and modernity, there is a pronounced conflict between the two. In fact, cinema carries a series of narratives that have not only failed to create a link between indigenous traditions and modernity but have also ignited the flames of anger and conflict between tradition and modernity, with the Islamic Revolution being a prominent symbol of this issue. The conflict between tradition and modernity is evident in the films of the Pahlavi period." (Interview with Karim Aalam, 18/04/1403) One film critic believes that: "The image has played an important role in the Iranian mindset from the beginning until now, especially during the Pahlavi era. During that time, we faced artificial, greenhouse, legendary, and illusory relationships, with the urban Iranian portrayed as the person of the progressive era in the Pahlavi period. The Pahlavi outlook was not based on absolute opposition to tradition or complete anti-traditionalism; rather, it sought to purify it and preserve parts of tradition that could contribute to modernity. This aimed to create a sense of calm among audiences, so they would not worry about losing traditions, as a significant portion of indigenous traditions remained intact." (Interview with Mahdi Nazemi, 07/04/1403)

Until the onset of the New Wave of Iranian cinema, one cannot speak of cinema's role in strengthening Islamic and Iranian traditions. From the late 1330s onwards, with the emergence of the New Wave of Iranian cinema and the arrival of intellectual filmmakers,

greater attention to producing profound cinematic works based on customs, rituals, and local folklore led to the formation of a new dynamic in Iranian cinema. For example, Ali Hatami, as a symbol of Iranianizing cinematic drama, addresses the carpet-washing tradition of Ardahal in Kashan in a scene from his film "Tughi." Bahram Beyzae adopts a mythical perspective on Iranian history through cinema. Masoud Kimiai, basing his work on popular culture and emphasizing themes such as honor, zeal, and chivalry, has contributed to the Iranianization of the New Wave of Iranian cinema. Here, a new line in cinema, known as documentary cinema, emerges, which bears a stronger Iranian essence and aroma compared to narrative cinema. Nasser Taghvai's documentary film "Badjen" showcases the Zar ceremony in southern Iran, specifically in Bushehr Province. Similarly, the documentary "Holy Pit" by Hajir Daryush introduces the ancient sport of wrestling in the 1340s. In fact, documentary cinema is significantly more aligned with indigenous and Iranian concepts and themes and has been able to convey these ideas to the audience as well (Interview with Hossein Poursattar, 03/05/1403). After the revolution, one of the first places that was immediately shut down by the revolutionaries was the cinema. This indicates that there is not a proper connection between cinema and society. According to one filmmaker: "Ali Hatami can perhaps be considered one of the few filmmakers who was concerned with the revival of Iranian traditions through cinema. Filmmakers like Ali Hatami created lasting films rooted in Iranian tradition when the intense pressure of modernity led to the marginalization of tradition. The profound, charming, and intelligent dialogues in Hatami's films have become part of the everyday literature of contemporary Iran. Despite addressing social, cultural, and political themes, Hatami's films are interwoven with everyday culture and Iranian and Islamic identity. In fact, some Iranian intellectuals, emphasizing the concept of a return to self, were seeking to revive the greatness of Iranian and Islamic identity." (Interview with Faeq Hosseini, 25/04/1403)

4.6. Cinema as a Tool for Presenting a Modern and Progressive Image of Iranian Society

Cinema, as a medium, is the best tool for presentation and representation. Media outlets, including radio, television, and cinema, tend to showcase political ideologies through a specific type of aesthetic that stands in contrast to the aesthetic structure of the preceding era, namely the Qajar period. Political authorities aimed to introduce and attribute all misfortunes

to the previous political regime using this aesthetic structure. The Pahlavi regime sought to create an aesthetic and epistemic rupture with the Qajar era. Consequently, it questioned all elements of the previous regime and aimed to reproduce an ideology aligned with its own goals. The triangular ideology of the Pahlavi government can be traced in three principles: Ancient nationalism, secularism, and westernization. With the help of cinema and by promoting the ideology of the Pahlavi regime, they showcased Iran in alignment with Western values and sought to create a distinction between Iranians and the people of the East, especially Arabs and Turks, while highlighting similarities between Iranians and Europeans as well as Western civilization.

In Iran, rulers have utilized narrative film not to explore the fundamental social, moral, and psychological transformations of the native culture, but fundamentally to impose a contemporary image of Iran and to instill the desirability and inevitability of a Western-style modernization among Iranians. These policies, in the first half of this century, suited the worldview and aspirations of many educated Iranians who, for various reasons, viewed many aspects of traditional Iranian life as inferior to the progressive features of Western life. It wasn't long before an infatuation with the West led to imitation and a following of its cultural products. The growth and development of the Iranian film industry is a primary example of this. During the Pahlavi dynasty, the Iranian government, with foreign support, pursued Westernization and used film and television as major vehicles for this policy. This movement served both the interests of foreigners and the objectives of the Iranian regime. The interests of foreigners, especially the United States, thus paved the way to create a consumer market trapped in Iran, including the market for feature films and television programs. In return, the Iranian government presented a contemporary, alluring, pre-packaged image as an ideal for Iranian audiences (Nafisi, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 30-31).

During the Pahlavi era, the main red line in the production of feature films was the principle of the monarchy and the king himself. Political power during the Pahlavi period sought to display the profound transformations of Iranian society through a few limited cinematic productions in documentary form. For example, in the documentary "Wind of Change" by the French documentarian Albert Lamorisse, the government aimed to showcase the progress, development, and industrialization of Iran during the reign of the Pahlavi dynasty. The most straightforward policy for managing demand in cinema was censorship, which governments employed in various forms such as bans, altering dialogues, using graphics to manipulate

scenes, and editing out shots and sequences. During that period, the main sensitivities revolved around the royal family, political activities, and avoiding the portrayal of a poor and struggling image of Iranian society, especially in the eyes of foreign countries. As evident, this demand management was pursued not by focusing on the foundations of modernity, but rather on short-term damages to power and governance (Shafaqi, 2021: 115-116).

5.6. Cinema as a Tool for Disturbing Public-Private Boundaries

During the Pahlavi era, the main cultural difference between Iran and Europe lay in the social relationships between European men and women and the presence of European women in public spaces. Pahlavi modernity promised women inclusion in the public sphere and recognition of modern, educated women as citizens and compatriots. Accordingly, the policy of public visibility and mixing social relations contributed to the creation of a new social space in contrast to the cultural, social, and ideological environment of Iranian society. It seems that cinema during the Pahlavi period fostered changes, dismantling, and disturbances of the public-private boundaries. According to one director, "Cinema has transformed and shifted certain concepts and boundaries to such an extent that even at that time, it was impossible to screen films with themes of sex and sexual relations. For instance, the film "Naked until Noon," directed by Khosrow Haritash, was screened with very limited release due to its sexual scenes. Similarly, the film "Calmness in the Presence of Others" by Nasser Taghavi was also screened under restrictions regarding the violating certain social boundaries. At first glance, the popular cinema or *Filmfarsi* seems to defend the slogans of traditional society, such as honor, dignity, masculinity, chastity, and so forth. However, the real function of mainstream cinema is to portray sexual issues unconsciously, in contrast to the *Nouvelle Vague* cinema, which consciously seeks to depict social concerns and struggles. In a sense, Iranian society draws more from the surface than from its depths. In "Calmness in the Presence of Others," Nasser Taghavi aims to depict a society in decay and a raw and unfiltered portrayal, without fear, of an Iranian society that breaks down the boundaries between the public and private spheres.

In other words, issues that could not be openly discussed in public became visible on the cinema screen, such as smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, using opium, and sexual relations. The desensitization of certain social taboos, such as drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes, by beloved cinema stars like Behrouz Vothoughi, Fardin, and Malek Moti'i

contributed to the transfer of private issues into the public sphere, thus altering and disturbing the public-private boundaries." (Interview with Hossein Poursattar, 03/05/1403)

Cinema was able to disturb and disrupt the public-private boundaries, rather than transform them. Cinema imposes its distinct and new structure on any society it enters. According to one actor, "In the era before cinema entered Iranian society, the private lives of individuals, such as personal issues, sexual desires, and so on, were not visible. Cinema revealed and exposed the private-public space and, in other words, unified them. This is because, in cinema, there is no boundary between the public and private spheres. Before cinema, there was a wall between the inner and outer spaces. However, with cinema's help, the inner and outer become combined. As a result, the inability to tolerate such degradation of traditional boundaries led to an explosion in society and laid the groundwork for the Islamic Revolution of 1979." (Interview with Alireza Mazaheri, 11/05/1403)

According to one director, "The change in public-private boundaries is a demand of modern life. Everyday Iranian life has been based on a set of specific beliefs, customs, and traditions. One of the main reasons for the opposition to cinema was the alteration of the boundaries between the public and private spheres, which was itself related to the issue of women. The expansion of the public sphere and the restriction of the private sphere were among the impacts of cinema and cinematic films. The greatest issue and challenge facing cinema at that time was the entry of women into the frame of the cinema camera." (Interview with Bagher Piran, 19/05/1403)

6.6 Cinema as a Tool for Promoting Ideology and Gaining Political Legitimacy

According to Lenin, cinema is an art that can serve the ruling authority. This also occurred in Iran. The first films in Iranian cinema indirectly contained the thoughts of the governing authorities of the country. In these films, issues such as national security (as seen in "The Lur Girl") and the ancient values of Iran (depicted in "The Conquest of Lahore by Nader Shah Afshar" in the film *Ferdowsi*) were brought to attention (Shapur Azimi, "Mirrors Facing Each Other," *Farabi Quarterly*, No. 37, p. 58). During the era of Mohammad Reza Shah's second reign, Iranian society faced significant fractures, crises, and challenges considering the imbalanced modernization policies and development. For example, the threat of rebellion from the peasant and rural class was very evident due to prevalent discrimination and

injustice. Social relations in the form of landlord-peasant dynamics had reached such a level of corruption that, if it were not reformed from above in a more reformist manner, it might have pushed the entire society toward an inevitable revolution (Ishqi, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 104).

The land reform policy had numerous consequences. The migration from rural areas to cities and the increasing urban population in Iran, especially the marginalized urban population in Tehran, were significant repercussions of land reform (Sadr, 2002 AD/1381 SH: 167). In the early 1340s, with the onset of top-down modernization policies aimed at transforming Iranian society, commercial cinema in Iran became a tool to support the reform policies of the government, particularly land reform. The Shah aimed to end the landlord-peasant system in the villages and provide agricultural land to the peasants. In cinema, the oppression of peasants by landlords was depicted, alongside a positive portrayal of the wealthy urban class and the working class, who were popular at that time. However, this situation was entirely temporary; as the flow of rural migrants to Tehran and other large cities intensified, the seeds of social and political transformation were being sown, changing the face of Iran. Films began to emerge centered around migration and the arrival of peasants in cities, portraying landlords as oppressors while factory owners and workers (who were beloved by the public during that era) were shown as benevolent and kind (Mohammadi et al., 2020 AD/1400 SH: 223-224).

It seems that political systems have utilized cinema as a source of power for political ideology promotion and gaining political legitimacy. One director says: "In the era of Reza Shah, the awareness among elites regarding the power and influence of cinema was formed, albeit in a limited way. In this context, the Pahlavi government sought to support cinema and filmmakers while also trying to control and supervise it. Additionally, by enacting laws related to cinema and employing a tool called censorship, they established a framework for cinematic activities. A crucial question here is why, during the first Pahlavi era, laws were created for cinema but not for other arts such as painting, etc. This was because the elites recognized cinema's destructive and creative powers as a double-edged sword, and for this reason, they sought to create a structured framework to legally control and oversee cinema. During the Pahlavi era, state organizations such as the National Iranian Oil Company entered into lucrative contracts with renowned filmmakers like Ebrahim Golestan to produce documentaries concerning the activities of the National Iranian Oil Company. Ebrahim Golestan's documentary "Wave, Coral, and Granite" showcased the workings of the Iranian

oil company. During that period, several enduring commissioned films were produced and distributed by prominent figures in Iranian cinema. All these factors led the political power to realize that it could record and utilize its actions in history. If cinematic films were produced outside the framework and regulations of the Pahlavi regime, they would be confiscated by a tool called censorship.

For example, a simple event directed by Sohrab Shahid Thaleth was banned due to its portrayal of naked poverty in Iranian society. Similarly, the film "The Deers" by Masoud Kimiai, which represents an armed group and references the events at Siyahkal, was also banned because of its ending, and permission for the film to be screened was contingent upon altering that final sequence. After these changes and corrections, the film received permission for distribution and screening from the government.

In general, it can be said that the Pahlavi political regime did not utilize cinematic films for political transformation in a positive capacity; however, in a negative sense, the government prevented the production and screening of any cinematic film that contradicted the regulations and frameworks of the Pahlavi regime. In fact, cinema acted as a double-edged sword for the political regime. It could serve both the ruling class and the established regime alongside its official ideology, while also being in conflict with the societal norms and overarching goals of the political system. In other words, governments had no issues with the production, distribution, and screening of films as long as they didn't threaten the interests of the ruling regime; however, if the films contradicted the interests of the established regime or deviated from the frameworks of the Pahlavi regime, they would be censored and banned." (Interview with Hossein Poursattar, 03/05/1403)

7.6 Cinema as a Tool for Constructing a Unified Nation-State (National Cohesion and Social Integration)

One of the challenges facing political systems is national cohesion and social integration. Iranian society, as a transitioning society, has active and diverse social divides such as ethnic, linguistic, religious, center-periphery, and most importantly, tradition-modernity divides. More or less since the time of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, political elites have sought to present a standard model of Iranian national identity, highlighting the threats to national identity while proposing solutions. In this context, the Pahlavi regime aimed to achieve ethnic

and linguistic homogenization by promoting stereotypes and constructed identities. A sociology professor says: "Iran is an ethnically and linguistically diverse society. The nation-state building process attempts to impose uniformity and coordination on the society, eliminating ethnic, linguistic, religious, and racial diversities. From the era of Reza Shah, when the fundamental idea of the state was based on state-building and purification, to the present, cinema has served as a tool for homogenizing society, such as solidifying Persian as the national language, especially the Tehran dialect, as the standard language of Iranians. Beyond language, cinema is also utilized as a means to introduce a singular and unified image, appearance, and attire of Iranians for all citizens. During the Pahlavi era, cinema served as a tool for the cultural integration of Iranian society and the introduction of a standard language and standard modes of thinking to the community. However, this cultural integration could not take place simultaneously with economic integration. Cinema was able to touch on the cultural integration of Iranian society, but economic integration was absent. This contradiction and lack of coordination between cultural and economic integration is the source of many conflicts in society." (Interview with Kamal Khaleqpanah, 23/05/1403)

According to another cinema actor: "One of the most important questions raised in the field of Iranian cinema is why Iranian cinema is monolingual and why local films or films in local languages have never been considered mainstream in Iranian cinema. Even when local Iranian languages do appear in cinema, they are mostly portrayed in a comedic manner; languages such as Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic, Lorish, Gilaki, etc., when they found their way into cinema, entered Iranian cinema as subjects of ridicule. For this reason, they were not influential; however, the reality is that one of the important tools of the modern state for the expansion and stabilization of the official language in Iran has been cinema itself. In other words, being able to watch cinematic films meant that knowing the national language, which was Persian at that time, was considered media literacy and the audience had to learn Persian to see, understand the story's subject, and enjoy the film. Generally, it can be said that the political system used cinema more for institutionalizing national sovereignty than for social and national cohesion and integration. Cinema during that historical period did not create social cohesion and integration because it mocked all Iranian dialects in cinematic films, which was entirely contrary to national cohesion. Throughout its existence, cinema also solidified incorrect cultural transformations, as cinema, like other modern media, has numerous disadvantages as well as advantages." (Interview with Alireza Mazaheri, 11/05/1403)

Another interviewee says: "During the Pahlavi era, Iranian cinema played a role in establishing Persian as the national and standard language for Iranian society. Cinema also helped to represent Persian dialects alongside the national language. One of the contradictions found in cinematic films during the Pahlavi era is the portrayal of local clothing, which was never removed. In these films, women wear local attire but do not have hijab. In fact, there is a conscious emphasis on displaying local clothing alongside the unveiled appearance of women in cinematic films." (Interview with Mahdi Nazemi, 07/04/1403)

Conclusion

From the moment cinema entered Iran, it served nationalism, modernity, and Westernization. Undoubtedly, when cinema arrived in Iran, it did not encounter a society in a vacuum; rather, it was filled with a rich history and deep-rooted Iranian and Islamic traditions, along with multiple layers of different identities. Cinema, as a new communication medium that was introduced to Iran by the Qajar king from the West, was controlled and managed by the government from the very beginning. The fear of the government regarding the reactions of traditional and religious classes, especially political and religious elites, led to cinema being relegated to a form of entertainment reserved for the king, the court, and those close to the country's leader.

When cinema managed to break beyond the walls of the Qajar palaces and spread into society, engaging a significant portion of social classes, it transformed into a tool of power and propaganda. The public access of cinema marked the beginning of conflicts among various social classes regarding its nature, control, and utilization for political, cultural, and economic purposes. The reality is that cinema in the West arose from the fundamental changes in the scientific, technological, and artistic realms of European society and civilization, while in Iran; cinema was introduced as an imported Western commodity to the court of Mozaffar ad-Din Shah and the circle of political elites. Iranian cinema quickly caught the attention of the ruling class for their utilization and exploitation, becoming a tool of political power.

During the Qajar period, despite being situated within the power structure and the interest of elites, cinema was still regarded as a form of entertainment and leisure. Regarding the very limited access of the general public to cinema, its influence was not widespread. On one hand, cinema was viewed as a luxury entertainment that was exclusive to a specific class of

aristocrats and elites, and on the other hand, those involved in cinema and the political elite were not seeking to exploit its power, as they were fundamentally unaware of cinema's influence and potential.

Cinema only transformed into a tool of modernity when political or artistic elites reached a clear understanding of its status, importance, and influential power, and consciously utilized its capabilities to transmit Western culture, undermine Islamic-Iranian traditions, present a modern and renewed image of Iranian society, blur the boundaries between the public and private spheres, promote ideology, and gain political legitimacy, as well as to construct a unified nation-state and facilitate political and social transformation. This process was deliberately and systematically initiated during the Pahlavi II era.

During the Pahlavi dynasty, cinema was consciously turned into a tool for transferring Western values and concepts from European civilization to Iranian society. Iranian cinema in the era of Pahlavi II became a tool for advancing modernization in Iranian society, thanks to the financial and non-financial support from Pahlavi state institutions and the king himself. The detrimental consequences of the top-down modernization imposed by Mohammad Reza Shah, in general, and the use of cinema as a means of modernizing Iranian society in particular, left deep negative impacts on the Islamic-Iranian identity of the nation. The attacks on cinemas and the burning of theater halls at the end of the Pahlavi era and the beginning of the Islamic Republic serve as the best evidence of the contradiction between cinema during the Pahlavi period and the desires, aspirations, norms, and authentic values of the native culture.

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